

## Music and the Healing Arts

By Sarah Belle Dougherty

"In the beginning was the *logos*" -- the word or sound scriptures worldwide express the idea that the first cosmic manifestation was vibration, whether sound, light, or breath, and that this primal vibration, differentiating into sounds, colors, or rhythmic breathing, formed the basis for all that has followed. Scientists increasingly picture the material universe as a continuum of movement expressing itself as an interplay of vibrations. The almost "metaphysical" view of nature often implicit in twentieth-century physics has begun in recent decades to have a real impact on accepted views, and scientists find themselves reconsidering the value of traditional concepts and practices of many cultures.

In today's renaissance of the healing arts many new-old ideas are emerging, some dealing with the physical and psychological effects of music and vibration. Several current streams of research and thought are brought together in *Music. Physician For Times to Come*, an anthology edited by Don G. Campbell, director of the Institute for Music, Health, and Education in Boulder, Colorado. Selections from many people well known in their fields cover the mechanisms and effects of hearing, therapeutic uses of music, possible future potentials, and more philosophical and spiritual discussions of the effect of sound on human beings.

The growing recognition of the basic importance of vibration lies at the root of much modern research into music as a therapeutic tool. Music therapy, however, is still in its infancy. Hospitals use soothing music to help relieve pain and stress and to promote healing and relaxation which affect the autonomic, immune, endocrine, and neuropeptide systems as well as encouraging positive emotional states. Music is employed to encourage creativity, improve learning, enhance auto and subliminal suggestion, and help evoke imagery for self-exploration and healing. Music and movement are combined to bring about mind-body balance and release blocked energies. While significant, such applications touch only the surface of sound's potential. Researchers on the leading edge continue to find physical, psychological, and spiritual applications of music to human well-being.

Appreciation of the profound potency of music exists in almost all cultures. For instance, ancient Greeks such as Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle recognized that the healing power of music was grounded in its relation to the mathematical structure of the cosmos and humanity. Modern research into cymatics, the material patterns evoked by sound, have led to an increased appreciation of its fundamental influence on matter. Reflecting on this, Cathie E. Guzzetta remarks that "matter assumes certain shapes or patterns based on the vibrations or frequency of the sound to which it is exposed. . . . The forms of snowflakes and faces of flowers may take on their shape because they are responding to some sounds in nature. Likewise, it is possible that crystals, plants, and human beings may be, in some way, music that has taken on visible form." ("Music Therapy: Nursing the Music of the Soul," *Music*, p. 149).

Discussions in the anthology dealing with the work of French physician, psychologist, and ear specialist Alfred A. Tomatis are among the most fascinating. His revolutionary theories on the mechanism for hearing and on the role of sound in human life run counter to several accepted scientific models. Hearing itself, he believes, takes place by conduction of vibration from the eardrum through the bones of the skull to the cochlea, rather than through the small bones of the middle ear which act instead as a protective damper. These views remind us that even long-accepted explanations of how the senses work are interpretations rather than facts. Largely from considering fetal development, Tomatis has concluded that hearing is the fundamental physical sense, holding that the skin with its sense of touch is a later specialization of the ear's sensory cells, rather than the reverse. Hearing's vital role is suggested by the fact that the auditory nerve is connected directly or indirectly with most of the other cranial nerves,

including the vagus which reaches the back muscles, larynx, lungs, heart, and the abdominal organs, including the entire digestive tract. Dr. Tomatis has used sound and sonic training of muscles in the mid-ear to successfully treat a variety of problems -- among them ear, nose, and throat complaints, hearing and voice loss, spots before the eyes, eye muscle imbalances, depression, hyperactivity, and dyslexia -- as well as to increase energy, concentration, and memory skills.

According to Dr. Tomatis, the primary function of the ear is to "electrically" (for lack of a better term) stimulate and recharge the cells of the body, a process he calls cortical charge. This function is related to balance, with "the joints, the muscles, in other words the body's posture -- everything we use to fight against gravity -- all this is tied to the labyrinth of the ear" (p. 17). In his work with Gregorian chant among the Benedictines, he has found that chanting which is centered on the middle to higher frequencies of the human voice, combined with active, attentive, disciplined listening, energizes the body and promotes mental and spiritual activity.

Tibetan chanting has similar aims and effects. Interestingly, a Tibetan medical doctor remarked that "the ear collects the spiraling energy from the cosmos, this energy gives life to man and we see this vitality in the light which shines forth from our eyes" (P. 48). Both types of chant require training in listening and production techniques, especially breathing, as well as "living the life," before a practitioner can become an integral part of a choir. Several current choral groups and individual performers base their work on the spiritual power of music to promote well-being in performer and listener. Campbell himself, among others, advocates the use of toning -- the protracted sounding of musical tones and overtones -- to promote bodily and inner health (Cf. *The Roar of the Silence*, Quest Books, 1989).

Other traditions are also influencing modern therapeutic practices connecting music, health, and spiritual well-being. One influential stream is exemplified in *The Way of the Shaman* by anthropologist Michael Harner, who learned shamanic practices among the South American Indians and went on to become a practicing healing shaman drawing on the techniques of several other traditional cultures. In his system the practitioner uses drumming and rattles to induce a nonordinary state so that he can journey at will through inner worlds, perceive the psychic causes of wellness and disease, and help others regain or maintain health by his actions taken on astral planes. Similar techniques are used by many healers in traditional cultures worldwide, who integrate music, art, dance, and drama in the healing process, treating the patient in the context of his whole being rather than using music merely to change particular behavior. (See Joseph J. Moreno, "The Music Therapist: Creative Arts Therapist and Contemporary Shaman," *Music*, pp. 167-85) Their personal experiences of inner realms make these healers aware of the reality of nonphysical beings and energies and the interconnectedness of all in the universe.

Harner's therapeutic experience has indicated that almost everyone has the potential, to one degree or another, to cultivate shamanic abilities if he or she wishes to do so. Researchers in fields such as biofeedback have found that entrainment of the brainwaves to the alpha and theta rhythms by a variety of means induces similar trance and visionary experiences. (Entrainment is a phenomenon in which "the powerful rhythmic vibrations of one object will cause the less powerful vibrations of another object to lock in step and oscillate at the first object's rate" *Music*, p. 218). Music also stimulates the patient's psychological entrainment with the therapist or healer -- an inner synchrony important to deriving benefit from treatment, which features in the relations of a disciple and spiritual teacher as well. Clearly the physical, psychological, and spiritual qualities of the person to whom we become entrained would be of the utmost importance, as our being will tend to take on these qualities to a degree. As with the uses of hypnosis or suggestion, one needs to be aware of the consequences of putting one's being *en rapport* with that of another person or of opening oneself to the inhabitants and forces of the astral range of nature which may be difficult to shut off. Interestingly, a spiritual teacher, for example, will synchronize his or her vibration to that of the pupil rather than dominating the pupil's vibration.

Several researchers, such as Harner and Stanislav Grof, who began with the use of drugs to induce various altered states for therapeutic purposes, were surprised to find that the same states could be induced in almost anyone by such simple procedures as drumming or altered breathing rhythms. Some twenty years ago musician and educator Helen Bonny popularized the practice of using guided imagery while listening to music in a light self-induced trance as an aid to self-exploration, music appreciation, and physical and psychological therapy (*Music and Your Mind. Listening with a New Consciousness*, with Louis Savary, 1973, 1990). She found that listening to music in a relaxed, meditative state would often trigger strong psychological experiences; again, she was surprised at the inner depths opened by attentive listening to such an ordinary stimulus -- generally in her case, European classical music. Such findings have convinced many that these induced levels of awareness are not abnormal but represent basic, vital aspects of human consciousness -- otherwise they could not be so simply and almost universally induced.

Various types of sound, however, affect distinct areas of the brain and so produce dissimilar results. Tomatis, for example, distinguishes strongly between the action of higher frequencies, such as those found in Gregorian and Tibetan chants, which energize the person and awaken the higher consciousness, and the hypnotic effect of lower frequencies predominating in certain types of drumming: "At the risk of oversimplifying, hypnotic effects are those of relatively low frequency which play on the more primitive areas of the brain. With Gregorian chant you are directly affecting the cortex, which controls the monkey rather than being led by him" (p. 23). The human brain is complex; it includes the brainstem or old or reptilian brain, the mid-brain or limbic system, and the neo-cortex which is divided into the left, right, and pre-frontal lobes. Also it is connected with the sense organs and the energy centers or chakras, including the pineal and pituitary bodies. We are only beginning to understand the roles of different parts of the brain as instruments of human consciousness as well as how and why various types of stimuli affect their activities and interactions. Scientific research into human beings has only recently shown signs of moving beyond physiology to consider phenomena such as consciousness and spirit as existing in their own right rather than as merely byproducts of matter and brain chemistry. Truly enlightened use of music in a scientific context to affect the human body and psyche depends on a growing comprehension of what a human being is on many levels, and how these levels are integrated in the physical body.

Undeniably music or sound is a potent force, one which has as much power to debilitate and destroy when incorrectly used as it does to cure and elevate when properly used. Just as a wine glass can be made to sound, and finally to shatter, when exposed to a synchronous frequency, so can other forms be affected because everything, from atoms and molecules to cells, organs, people, and planets, expresses itself through its own fundamental frequency. "Such vibrational techniques, on the principle of resonance, are now used in a more refined way for treating specific localized illnesses. As we may imagine, such power is dangerous, for an inaccurate frequency input may inadvertently affect areas other than the ones being treated, for all sound has power and resonates something somewhere. (Herbert Whone, "Music -- The Way Out of the Maze," *Music*, p. 200) Along similar lines Tomatis cites the example of mantra yoga, where

the posture has to be perfect for the mantra to work, which explains why some people have destroyed themselves in doing the mantra without knowing the key to proper listening. A mantra can damage a person much faster than it can restore him. So there's definitely a danger. In order to do a mantra well one should know well all the practice and the theory, and especially the way to listen.

What the ancients knew was that once one reaches perfect auditory posture, the body reaches out and literally incorporates all the sound that comes from outside. The subject identifies with himself, knows himself, touches himself both from outside and from within.

-- *Music*, p. 16

Certainly the uses of music now established in health care do not usually touch such profound areas of human consciousness. But as the Western world broadens its horizons, more people are reevaluating the importance given to various faculties: of hearing as contrasted with vision, and of the creative, intuitive aspects of consciousness as contrasted with the intellectual and organizing. Healing involves balancing and harmonizing the many aspects of each human being and, as we and the cosmos are fundamentally vibrations, music and other expressions of vibration can be natural aids in this process. Viewing each person as multidimensional leads to treatment of inner as well as physical causes and symptoms. At the same time there are risks in science adopting the more sophisticated techniques of non-Western cultures which deliberately act on the chakras, energy-body, and life forces or pranas: imperfectly trained practitioners may in ignorance use methods unaware of their serious side-effects on individuals. The forces on all planes which can be released by music and vibration may be invisible but they are real and extremely potent.

That music has a strong contribution to make toward physical and spiritual well-being has been apparent to those in both ancient and traditional cultures as far back as any records of such activity exist. Largely ignorant of our real selfhood and the varying qualities of the inner reaches of human and cosmic experience, our challenge today is one of discrimination: to adopt the beneficial while avoiding the harmful in both modern and traditional practices. In this process, positive physical results are not necessarily indications of a practice's inner value or safety. As always, the key lies in a growing knowledge and understanding of oneself.

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